

Research and Development Organisation and the respective quality assurance/inspection agency.

(c) Whenever considered necessary and feasible, the equipment is trial evaluated, as part of its technical evaluation, after both technical and commercial bids have been obtained. Commercial bids of only those vendors are opened, who meet the technical requirements. After opening the commercial bids, a comparative statement of prices is prepared and commercial negotiations held with the lowest bidder.

(d) and (e) The Government continuously endeavours to effect improvements in the structures, processes and procedures related to Procurement. The Group of Ministers (GoM) constituted on 17th April, 2000 by the Government has recommended a series of measures, including the creation of a separate and dedicated institutional structure *i.e.* the Defence Procurement Board, to undertake the entire gamut of procurement related functions in a more professional, coordinated and cost effective manner. The recommendations of the GoM have been presented to the Prime Minister on 26.2.2001. After examination and acceptance of the Report by the Government, action as required will be taken expeditiously.

Talks with Myanmar on Cooperation in Hydro-carbon Sector

4447. SHRI RAMDAS AGARWAL: Will the Minister of EXTERNAL AFFAIRS be pleased to state:

(a) whether he and the Chairman of Myanmar in SPDC (State Peace and Development Council) held talks recently in Myanmar for cooperation in the hydro-carbon sector including the supply of natural gas to India;

(b) whether New Delhi is sending any high-level expert-delegation to Myanmar shortly to explore the possibilities in this regard, as reported in the 'Hindustan Times' dated 18th February, 2001;

(c) if so, the likely gas pipeline routes from Myanmar linking to India; and

(d) the details of the availability of crude oil/natural gas from the proven fields?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS (SHRI KRISHNAM RAJU): (a) Yes, Sir.

(b) to (d) A two-member expert delegation from Oil & Natural Gas Corporation (ONGC) and Gas Authority of India Limited (GAIL) visited Myanmar from April 1-6, 2001 to explore the possibilities of gas export from Myanmar to India and to evaluate the prospects of available offshore exploration blocks.

Hindi Officers/Translators in Ministry of External Affairs

4448. DR. Y. LAKSHMI PRASAD: Will the Minister of EXTERNAL AFFAIRS be pleased to state:

- (a) the number of posts of Hindi Translators/Hindi Officers/ Assistants created in his Ministry and allied PSUs/Attached and Subordinate Offices for propagation of Hindi as official language and encouragement of Hindi correspondence;
- (b) the number of such posts lying vacant and since when; and
- (c) the reasons therefor and the steps taken to fill up such vacancies?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS (SHRI KRISHNAM RAJU): (a) The number of posts of Hindi Translators/Hindi Officers/Hindi Assistants in the Ministry of External Affairs, including our Mission and Posts abroad and the Central Passport Organisation, is as follow:

Number of Hindi Translators	— 23
Number of Hindi Officers	— 9
Number of Hindi Assistants	— Nil

(b) and (c) The post of Second Secretary (Hindi and Culture) in the High Commission of India, Suva, Fiji, is lying vacant since early March 1999, when the Mission was reopened. An incumbent has already been selected who would be assuming charge in the near future.

In the Central Passport Organisation, out of the total of 15 posts of Hindi Translators sanctioned in 1992, at present, 13 are lying vacant